

## MATCHES

I will smoke my next cigarette immediately,  
relieving the tension of not knowing  
when this minor but inevitable event  
will take place.

Before the epoch of smoking,  
men were high-strung, murderous,  
their history a tale of jumpiness,  
rash action, wholesale slaughter.

Just read the chapter on the middle ages.  
No knight ever enjoyed this pleasure,

removing his chain mail gloves  
after slaying a many-headed dragon,  
lifting the metal face plate to position  
a cigarette between his lips

then dismounting to light it up  
on one of the beast's smoldering nostrils.

## THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

will finance no more expeditions  
to hack through your twisted undergrowth,  
to discover your source, map your shape.

The last two gentlemen to return  
spoke of quicksand and ancient walls,  
murderous insects, full green moons.

One broke down while addressing the meeting.  
His shoulders shook like a native dance  
under the mounted heads of rhino.

We have run out of exploratory zeal  
to travel the vein of the river,  
to push aside the last gigantic fern

and behold you naked by a low fire  
in the center of your very own Africa.

-- Billy Collins

Scarsdale NY